



Learning for Leadership. by A. K. Rice; Personal and Organizational Change Through Group Methods: The Laboratory Approach. by Edgar H. Schein; Warren G. Bennis

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Book Reviews

Learning for Leadership. By A. K. Rice. Great Britain: Tavistock Publications, 1965. 200 pp. \$6.00. (Humanities Press Book Inc.)

Personal and Organizational Change Through Group Methods: The Laboratory Approach. Edgar H. Schein and Warren G. Bennis. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965. 376 pp. \$8.25.

The objective of both books is to give the reader the basic theory behind, as well as an idea of what goes on, during the two-week conferences at Tavistock (Rice) or the one, two, or three week "laboratories" (the learning situation is a laboratory where the subjects' behavior is the focus of inquiry) developed originally by the National Training Laboratories. I will leave it to the reader to read the interesting details regarding location, administration and scheduling of the conferences. I should like to focus on the basic theoretical agreements as well as raise some questions about each approach.

There are at least four basic agreements regarding objectives of both educational programs. Both agree that it is important for people (1) to become more aware of themselves and come to terms with themselves (i.e., to be able to differentiate between what is real in the outside world and what is projected on to it from inside), (2) to become more competent in dealing with groups so that the unique capacities of the individuals are enhanced and so that problem solving effectiveness is increased; (3) to become more competent in coping with intergroup rivalries (win-lose; hero vs. traitor) and increase, whenever feasible, the probability that intergroup competition will lead to more integrated decisions; and finally, (4) to learn how to design organizations that utilize human capacities and energies for the enhancement of both the individual and the organization.

There is also agreement on the process of learning. They are, (1) members should experience and have control over their learning, (2) the "here and now" behavior should be the focus of attention (the past and the future are relevant as they illuminate the present) as well as (3) that optimal individual anxiety can help problem solving and interpersonal relationships.

Finally, there is agreement that the optimal learning conditions, include (1) a cultural island so that the members are in relative isolation, (2) the creation of dilemmas that make people face reality and make informed choices, (3) optimal anxiety (enough to want to consider changing but not so much to cause regression or to inhibit listening and exploring new behavior), (4) maximized control by the members over their pace and depth of learning, and (5) concepts to help develop cognitive maps of the newly acquired learnings that will permit generalization beyond the immediate context.

Each approach has a different theoretical underpinning which guides the planning and execution of the learning experiences.

Rice's model is basically psychoanalytic with a heavy emphasis on Klein, for the individual, Bion for the small group, and Rice and his colleagues for a theory of intergroup and organizational behavior. The individual begins with no ego that differentiates feelings and their causes. What he feels about an object that is outside becomes an attribute of the object itself. He projects his feelings into it. Objects that gratify are good; those that frustrate are bad. The mature individual must learn that the same object can frustrate and satisfy and that he must develop a leadership role through his ego that mediates between the internal world of good and bad objects and the external world of reality. The tendency to split good from bad in themselves and project their resultant feelings upon others is a major barrier to competent living. Leadership-subordinate relationships are especially fraught with love-hate feelings. Subordinates depend on their leaders to identify their goal and to devise ways of reaching it.

Every group can be viewed as a work group trying to accomplish some task. While working toward a task, a group makes one of three basic assumptions. To reproduce itself (pairing), to obtain security from one individual upon whom its members can depend (dependent), or to preserve itself by attacking or running away (flight-fight). Members of a group behave *as if* they were aware of these basic assumptions, even though these assumptions are unconscious. Participation in a basic assumption is unavoidable and involves members sharing in the emotions to which they contribute. Conflict may exist between the

basic group and the individuals who compose it; the work group and the basic group; the work group suffused with the emotions associated with one basic assumption and the other repressed or denied basic assumption. One of the consultant's primary tasks is to help members face up to and work through these conflicts.

Rice is able to integrate these basic theories effectively and utilize them in developing the major components of the conference which are: the study group (where focus is on interpersonal relationships), the large group (where focus is on interpersonal issues related to larger than face-to-face groups), the intergroup exercise (group vs. group problems), lectures, and application groups. The approach is internally consistent, unique and full of provocative inquiry.

In this spirit, I should like to raise several questions. Rice believes that, in addition to the conscious factors, leaders should be aware of the unconscious factors that operate in groups that inhibit task performance. It is the task of the staff members to point out group factors, but not individual behavior. He believes, for example, that a group can make assumptions, such as to be dependent, flight or fight.

One of the more difficult unanswered points is precisely how does the consultant infer group factors from individual activity. One of the major problems is the process of inference that Rice uses. Basically, the consultant is the measuring instrument. He infers *group* processes by what he perceives, feels, and experiences. . . . "When I am feeling certain things that must be going on in my unconscious, I use this as evidence of what is being communicated to me at the unconscious level." What skills, insights, etc. make the consultant a valid observer of group processes? How is the validity of the inferences checked?

Many times, the members had difficulty in seeing a connection between what they were experiencing and Rice's view of the group's behavior. Lacking clarity as to how he reached some of his conclusions, the members felt lost, uncertain, and if they accepted his view, they became more dependent upon Rice (something which he prefers to minimize). For example, on page 60 we note that in one group, the members dealt with the initial ambiguity of the study group by introducing themselves. At the end they concluded that they learned very little. One man said loudly, "Well, that cleared the decks." Rice responded, "that they had perhaps been cleared for a fight and that the fight was going to be against me for not doing what was expected of me—for not giving the kind of leadership they expected." The members denied feeling any hostility. Rice apparently did not agree

with them. He stated that ambiguity is frightening and the people wanted their leader to instruct them how to structure the situation so that they could learn. Since he refused, they will naturally hate him. They, in turn, denied feeling hatred.

Why must they hate him? Perhaps they were more worried about the uncomfortableness of the ambiguous situation? Perhaps they were perfectly capable of accepting his "odd" behavior as being necessary if they were to learn. Perhaps their annoyance or hate was not due only to his refusal to take on the expected leadership role but also due to the type of intervention that he made. Maybe they were feeling, "We have trouble enough handling social weightlessness, why make us feel even more incompetent by making an intervention which, if true, is beyond our present capacity to deal with and therefore difficult for us to utilize." If so, then their comments (p. 61) seem to be reasonable. "I don't understand what all this talk of hatred is about. I don't feel hatred for anybody here, not even for the consultant." But Rice, I judge, would not tend to accept these responses. He would say, by words and/or nonverbal expressions, "You really aren't aware of your feelings—but I'll be patient and help you." Why wouldn't such a strategy lead to further annoyance with the consultant which might be interpreted by the consultant as evidence for his prediction. But, is this not a self-fulfilling prophecy?

In another example, Rice (p. 72) described a situation where he lectured, at the closing of the conferences, on the nature of leadership, problems of flight-fight, the importance of expressing anger openly, etc. At the end of the lecture the members asked such questions as "How does this conference compare with others you have held?" and "How do you judge whether a conference has been successful?"

Rice interpreted these questions as the members avoiding the work involved in reviewing the conferences. He went on to say, "I said I thought that the members were refusing to accept that I had told them what I could, that they still believed that I had all the answers, if only I would, like them, believe in my own omniscience."

Is Rice being fully consistent when he said he told them all he could? After all, he did have data about how other conferences compared with this one. He did have criteria by which he and his colleagues judged the conference. Could one not argue that they asked these questions to *reduce* their need to make him omniscient?

Perhaps Rice believed it was not effective leadership to share such information. If so, why did he not state so openly? Or, if he believed these questions were relevant why could he not reply that he would

provide such data provided others took the lead to review how they felt about the conference? When they asked for criteria, why would he not state his as part of a discussion where they developed their own criteria based upon this experience?

It is difficult to analyze the Schein and Bennis book as we have Rice's because they provide little protocol data that illustrate precisely how their view is carried out and the reactions of the conferees. One reason that such material was not presented may be that Schein and Bennis were attempting to comprehend a wider range of views. Another reason may be that few of the people whose work is relevant have published accounts comparable to Rice's (although some mimeographed papers do exist). The NTL group ought to take their theories seriously and provide more "here and now" data about their actual behavior. This is a serious limitation of the Schein and Bennis book. I believe that if a behavioral record existed of NTL consultant behavior, one would find many examples where they violated the Schein and Bennis criteria, for example, focused on people rather than acts, in a highly evaluative manner rather than objectively, and where psychological theory was rarely introduced, and did all these things knowingly and as part of their change strategy.

The Schein and Bennis book is organized around a model of attitude change with three stages. Stage one is *unfreezing*. It is accomplished primarily by (1) isolation from accustomed sources of support, (2) removal of self-defining equipment (titles, status), (3) loss of certain areas of privacy, (4) breakdown of hierarchical authority, and (5) a set of laboratory norms about the value of learning process (e.g. anything which occurs in the group can be legitimately scrutinized and analyzed; learning involves active participation; tolerance of certain amount of tension; initially one must trust the basic method).

Stage two is one of *changing* which includes scanning the interpersonal environment for new data and identifying with a model (usually the staff leader or the more competent members). Stage three involves *refreezing* which includes integrating new responses into the rest of the personality and attitude system as well as integrating the new responses into ongoing significant relationships. The learning method serves to reduce threat from others by being temporary, informal, egalitarian, isolated and self-contained, supportive faculty, providing psychological theory and by promoting an emphasis on here and now specific events and acts rather than people; objective reaction and analyses rather than evaluation, and the legitimacy of experimentation.

Schein and Bennis also provide a theoretical scheme that could be

used to predict the optimal type of laboratory training taking into account (1) the length of the laboratory, (2) the nature of the conferee population (teams or "family" groups) and staff characteristics (styles of leadership, number of staff members, etc.).

An important part of the book is the discussion of laboratory education for improving social systems. The authors argue that laboratory education can provide the instrument whereby such concepts as organizational "linking pin" (Likert) "subordinate autonomy" (McGregor) interpersonal competence (Argyris) and "organic system" (Burns and Stalker) may be achieved within the organization. They provide useful concepts and guideposts for the change agent to make certain (1) that the goals of laboratory education are truly appropriate for the organization (they caution against laboratory education as a panacea), (2) that the culture is prepared to accept change, (3) that the people involved (especially those in power) are internally committed (and not externally sold by persuasive arguments) and (4) that all involved are provided as much opportunity to reject or accept participation in the experience.

Research which is receiving increasing attention by some scholars interested in laboratory education, is also discussed. Although the total research literature is not reviewed, a typology of patterns for evaluation research is presented and several examples are presented. Miles specified ahead of time the probable contributions of personality variables, organizational press, and involvement in training upon on-the-job change. The results supported the predictions. Changes were associated with an "unfrozen" participation at the laboratory, with reception of feedback, with such personality factors as ego strength, flexibility, and affiliation, and finally with such organizational factors as security, autonomy, power, and problem solving adequacy.

Bunker, in a study of perceived behavior changes one year after laboratory participation shows that the participants are seen by their co-workers as increasing significantly more than controls in diagnosing, understanding social situations, listening, and cognitive openness.

In addition, the reader will find discussions of Morton's application of the laboratory method to a psychiatric setting; Blake's and Mouton's Managerial Grid approach, and Donald Klein's use of the laboratory approach in community development.

Reading the Schein and Bennis book, one would *not* get the impression that there exists a vocal group of consultants of the NTL network who are almost becoming anti-intellectual in that they rarely

worry about conceptualizing what they are doing or in providing systematic theory or research evidence for their views. My most recent stay at Bethel led me to wonder if one of the new norms developing was not "instant feel and delayed think." I was surprised how many faculty members felt that they should not try to conceptualize what they were doing because it could inhibit their creativity! The laboratory method was begun by men like Lewin who respected cognitive activity and who wanted to integrate the cognitive with the emotional. Any thrust, even temporary, in the direction of eliminating the cognitive would be committing the same error that Lewin and others tried to correct only this time it would be an overemphasis on feelings.

Finally, the authors include a description of a typical residential laboratory, the theory underpinning the T group, the other kinds of learning, experiences provided, as well as a complete overview of the laboratory training. To their credit, they described and analyzed three case examples of failures. Toward the end there is an honest and revealing discussion of such questions as (1) is laboratory training professional? (Yes, they reply, if research continues, the present codified system of ethics is strengthened, and practitioners are adequately trained and certified); (2) is laboratory training ideology, rather than inquiry? (inquiry: the laboratory emphasizes better mechanisms of choice); and (3) is laboratory training therapy in social science disguise? (Yes, if faculty uses certain styles; no, if they use others.)

One major question that I have with both approaches is related to the back-home application. I believe that many of the major objectives of each group can be achieved by learning experiences that are different and at times, incompatible. Research is needed to help us to understand why this is so. Also, some of these learning experiences are more culturally relevant than others are (and thus translatable) to back-home situations. Should not both groups work toward eliminating from their repertoire those learning experiences that are difficult to translate to real life? Would it not be optimal to offer people learning experiences where the substantive learning and the experiences are exportable to back-home life?

To close, these two books provide a rich, insightful, and systematic glimpse of the theory and practice of two of the more innovative approaches to re-education for effective leadership, and problem solving. Both provide exciting opportunities for research and both should emphasize research much more, lest they find themselves in the dilemma of expanding practice and declining valid theory. Nothing would help

to guarantee that they will be relegated, in time, to the fate of another fad. Both are too valuable to suffer this fate.

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Legislative Politics, U.S.A. (Second Edition) By Theodore J. Lowi.
Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1965. 224 pp. \$1.95.

In this new edition of *Legislative Politics, U.S.A.*, Theodore Lowi offers a rich and varied fare. He introduces Congress through the eyes of representatives of three different intellectual traditions. Included are a few pieces by perceptive journalists such as William S. White and Chalmers Roberts, traditional institutional descriptions by such established authorities as Woodrow Wilson, Carl J. Friedrich and Arthur Macmahon, and a number of articles by modern political scientists such as George Goodwin, Lewis Dexter, Richard Neustadt, Randall B. Ripley, and Lowi himself.

It is interesting that this collection should be published at this time. Neil MacNeil, a most perceptive journalist, recently delivered a speech calling attention to hostility between Congress and the intellectual community. It is worth quoting at some length.

The hostility is at every hand, in speeches in the House and Senate, as well as newspaper editorials and the books of political scientists. Take the American Assembly's current volume, *The Congress and America's Future*. In his introduction, David Truman has described with aptness the image of the typical Congressman as seen by the intellectual community. 'The cartoon symbol,' Professor Truman wrote, 'of the bewhiskered, frock-coated, and bungling old man, familiar to all newspaper readers, effectively illustrates a persistent stereotype.' But Truman's description has a greater application than he intended, for it will serve as well for the Congressman's image of the typical political scientist: a bewhiskered, frock-coated, bungling old man. . . .

From the beginning, many political scientists have approached the study of Congress with techniques strikingly at variance with those of other academic disciplines. . . . Often they have seemed more intent on reciting the litany of reform than in describing the place with precision and understanding. They have seemed more anxious to devise new ways to alter Congress rather than to learn how it truly functions. Too many have not followed the dictum of Thomas Huxley a century ago: 'Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion . . . or you shall learn nothing.' . . .